



John Surtees in a Lola Climax at Warwick Farm in 1963.

# THE CROSS OVER KING

Part Two of our profile on John Surtees: the only man to conquer two wheels and four

STORY BY TOM HOWARD / PHOTOGRAPHS BY GARY HAWKINS; LAT PHOTOGRAPHY; & AUTOPICS.COM.AU

At the end of his first season in Formula One racing in 1960, Surtees announced his retirement from bikes and was offered the number one drive at Lotus. He initially agreed and chose Jim Clark to be his team mate. But Surtees walked away from the deal at the last minute due to Ireland still having a contract with the squad and the storm that his move was brewing, something he still regrets.

"In many ways I shouldn't have done it. I should have said to myself: this is what Colin [Chapman] wants, so be it."

Ferrari asked John to drive for them but he didn't feel quite ready to join the team so he agreed to race a Cooper and then a new Lola for the Yeoman Racing Team. Two seasons with the squad earned John two second-place finishes

in the British and German grands prix in 1962 as he beat Ferraris and Porsches to finish fourth in the championship.

Such an ease of transition to four wheels caught the attention of Enzo Ferrari, who became desperate to sign Surtees and a year later he joined the iconic Scuderia. That year he went on to win the New Zealand Grand Prix at Pukekohe.

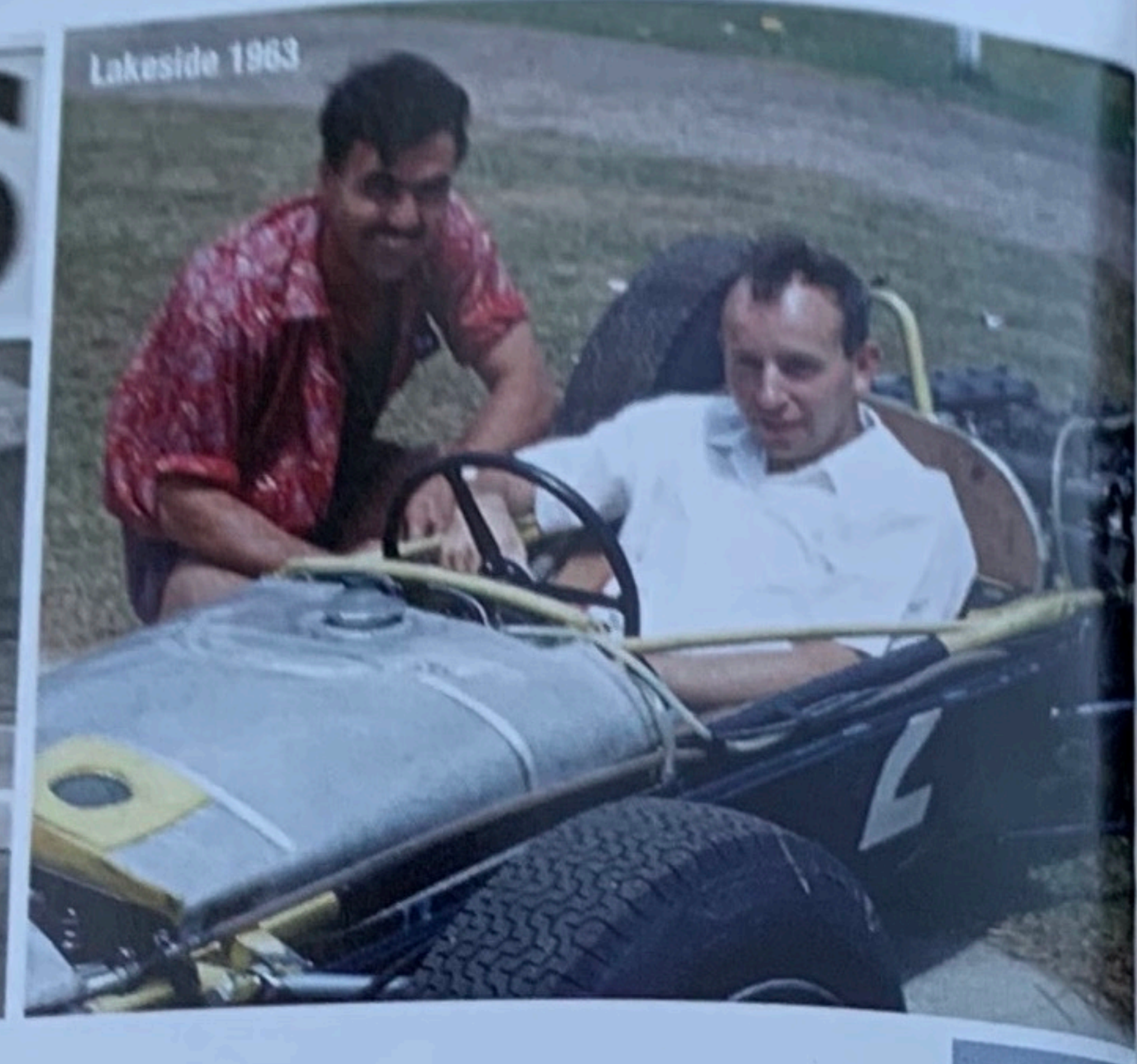
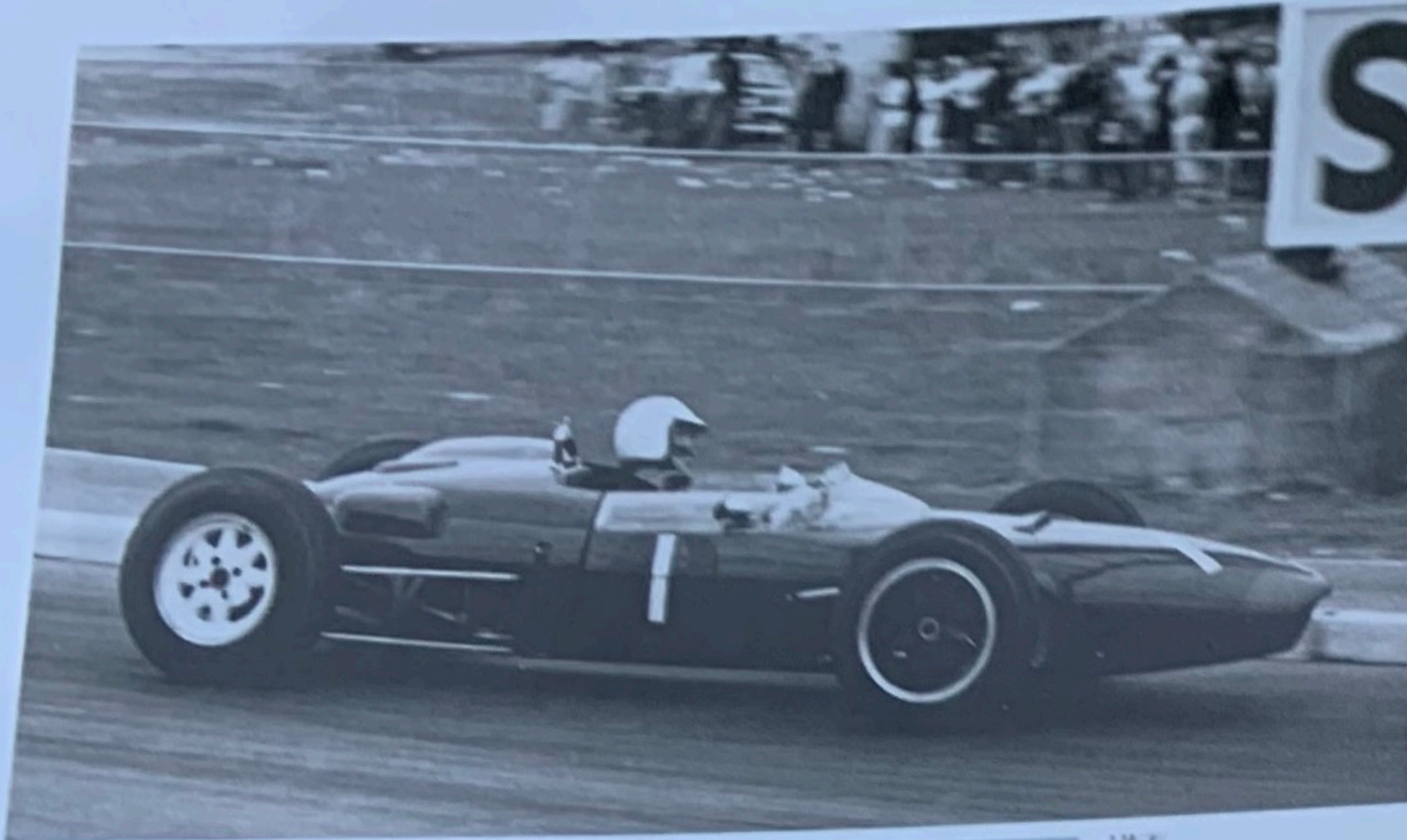
The combination of Surtees and Ferrari took a while to gel but during his first season with the Italian team a breakthrough moment arrived at the hugely dangerous Nurburgring Nordschleife. An engine problem for Clark's Lotus handed Surtees his maiden win by more than a minute. But the victory masked what was going on behind the scenes at Modena with the team more focussed on sportscar races like Le Mans.

"Ferrari were at a low point in their history when I joined. It was like they were starting again although I did manage to get my first GP win. At the beginning, Formula One took a back seat at Ferrari and the first year we had to build a car from parts we could find in the factory. It was very frustrating as a driver."

Everything clicked in his second season; a year which has gone down in motor racing history. Victories in Germany and in front of the tifosi at Monza saw Surtees crowned world champion at the age of 30. The feat came just four years after retiring from motorcycle racing and it proved he was king of both two and four wheels. Few have enjoyed the experience of winning for Ferrari at Monza and it's a feeling John recalls vividly.



Surtees during the 1970 Formula One World Championship.



Start of the 1962 International meet at Sandown. The stars in their Coopers line up: #1 Jack Brabham; #10 Bruce McLaren; #3 John Surtees.



"Luckily I had cemented a place with the Italians and they accepted me. When I won at Monza the crowd was so great I had to sit in my garage for three hours until it was safe to go out. It's one of the most important races of my career but my first win on a bike back in Wales was my most important race."

"Looking back on winning the world title that year though, I feel frustrated because we could have done so much more. We made it so hard for ourselves and we had to battle against adversity but a lot of that came from within the team."

The following year was another frustrating one, finishing fifth in the championship and it was the beginning of the end of his relationship with Ferrari.

"The year after my world title was disastrous. I wanted to follow up my win but circumstances intervened and attention and resources switched to sportscars as Ferrari wanted to beat Ford."

The great champion's career almost came to a premature end that year after suffering a life-threatening crash in a Formula 1 sportscar meeting at Mosport.

A front upright shattered on the Lola T70 he shared with Jackie Stewart, at high speed in practice, leaving him with a fractured pelvis, leg, spine and ruptured kidneys. It almost took his life but he eventually made a full recovery.

"I only got in the car because Jackie had been complaining about it. It was a real turning point of my life. I was at death's door for three or four days after it," he concedes. "One side of me had been pushed up four inches. It was touch-and-go whether I would come back and race again, but luckily I didn't have any head injuries so I continued."

Amazingly, Surtees returned next year with Ferrari but for test sessions he needed to be lifted by a crane and dropped into the car due to the extent of his injuries. That year he won two grands prix including a dramatic Belgian race at Spa in torrential rain, where he beat Jochen Rindt. It was also the race where Stewart suffered a horrific accident, which was the catalyst for his safety crusade on F1.

A series of disputes with Ferrari team manager Eugenio Dragoni over the years

eventually took its toll and at Le Mans that year Surtees quit the team immediately after being dropped from the 24-hour race line up. He still regards his time there as an important part of his career, notwithstanding the immense frustration it produced. Despite joining the Cooper F1 team during the middle of the season, he only narrowly missed out on a second F1 world title.

"I have fond memories of my time there and the people but when I look back at my time at Ferrari, we probably jointly lost three world championships. It ended in divorce, really."

He continued competing in Formula One for another six years, driving for Honda, BRM and his own Team Surtees, but in that time only one more grand prix win arrived. However, it was a special one. In 1967 Surtees won the Italian Grand Prix at Monza for the second time in one of F1's closest finishes, as he pipped Jack Brabham by two-tenths of a second.

Surtees hung up his helmet in 1972 but looking back on his Formula One career, he earmarked Brabham as his

toughest rival.

"There are racers and then there are drivers. Jack (Brabham) was one of the toughest and he was totally unpredictable and would try anything. Nothing unfairly, I might add. He was an aggressive racer and he never gave up on anything."

Surtees admits he would have been more a successful driver if he hadn't let his emotions dictate situations.

"If I had been less emotionally involved in my racing like Jackie Stewart or Ayrton Senna I would have been more calculated and thrown away some emotions. I would have not walked out on Lotus and not walked out on Ferrari at a time where I could have won championships."

Surtees also concedes he took on too much within his own team.

"I messed up. I should have concentrated on myself as a driver. I played at driving as we were only a small team and had little money, and in the end I gave up in 1972. I was designer, chief executive and sponsor procurer, so it wasn't the best way to prepare as a racing driver."

A spell as a team manager of Team Surtees followed his retirement from driving but his squad ran on a limited budget before closing in 1978. Recurring health problems and financial concerns forced him to end the Team Surtees adventure and he sold what was left of the team to Frank Williams, who had just started up his now iconic team.

"I had built a new factory for the team, acquired engines but I lost sponsorship and I was floored. We still built some good cars but we closed the team and I made the decision in hospital as it brought my health to breaking point. Arnoux tried to convince me to continue but I said that's it and I sold to Frank Williams. It left a bitter taste in my mouth."

Results for the team had been few and far between but Surtees did hand several

Australians a chance to shine. Alan Jones, Larry Perkins, Vern Schuppan and Tim Schenken all got behind the wheel of a Surtees designed and built F1 car. He also unearthed Frenchman Rene Arnoux, who would go on to record seven grand prix wins competing for Renault and Ferrari. The Brit burst back onto the international scene back in 2005 and 2006, when he became team principal of Great Britain's A1GP team. Surtees helped acquire a strong squad and they finished third in the inaugural season but a change of emphasis of the series saw him leave the category.

Bringing the next wave of young drivers through the ranks remains a top priority of John's even today with the formation of the Racing Steps Foundation in which he is heavily involved.

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This also led to the development of his talented son Henry, who managed to climb the lower formulas to compete in the 2009 FIA Formula Two Championship, before tragedy struck.

An errant wheel from another car struck Henry on the head at 193km/h, knocking him unconscious and he later succumbed to his injuries in hospital, aged just 18.

Since Henry's untimely death, the Henry Surtees Foundation was formed and has raised more than \$185,000 to assist people with brain injuries, to support the education of young people and provide education and training associated with motorsport-related programmes.

"I'm not one who scours the websites but after Henry died, what was so nice, was how he touched so many people. People have been so supportive and that helps with the pain.

Not surprisingly, Surtees questioned whether he could continue in the sport following Henry's death.



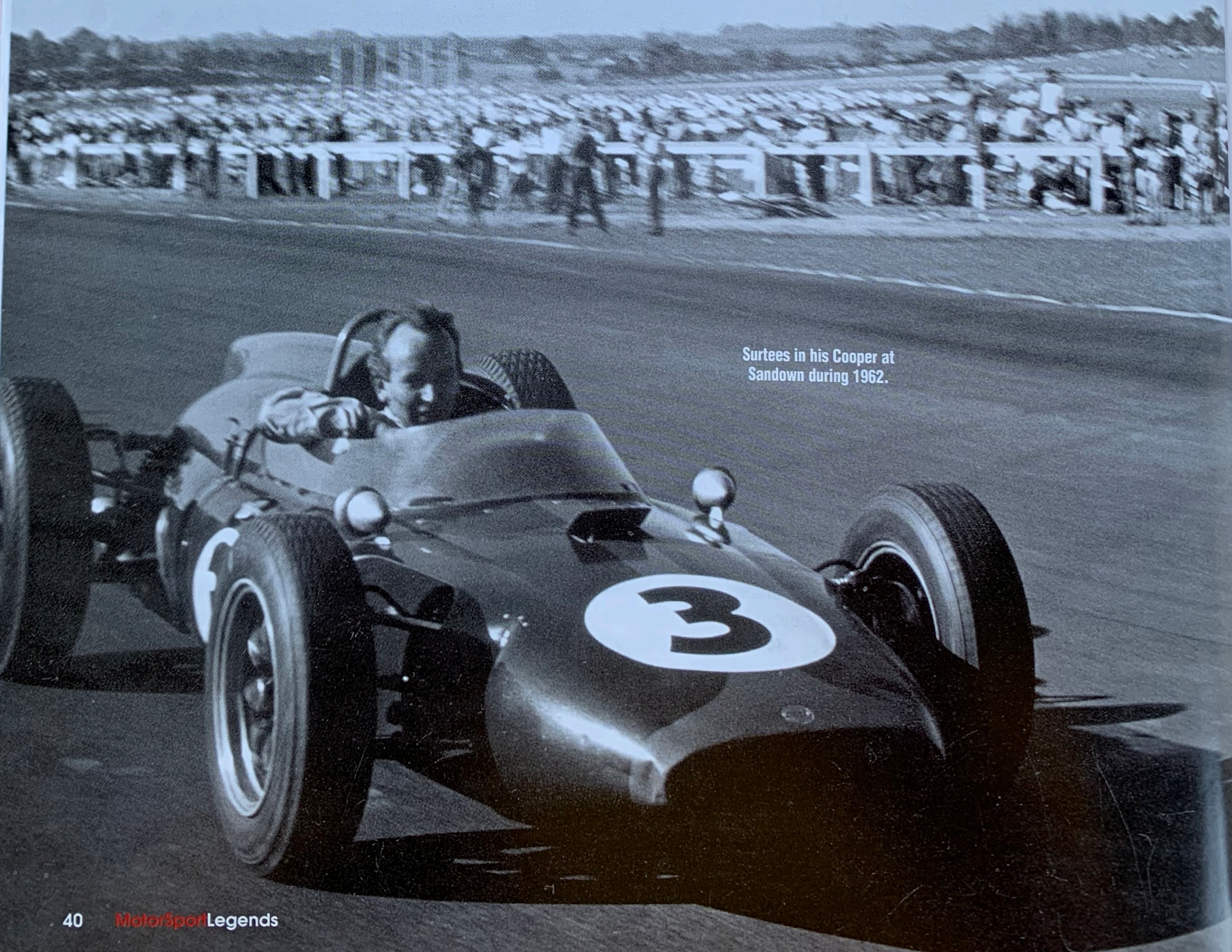
John behind the wheel of the Surtees TS7 at Brooklands.

"I had to think very deeply about what to do and not to do in motorsport afterwards. But I continued with my involvement in guiding youngsters into the sport."

After a life consumed by racing, today John remains heavily involved in the sport and champions the causes for young racers with as much muster as he displayed in his glory days. But he

does so with a significant part of his life missing.

"I don't really think about being the only man to win on two wheels and four. It's all in the past. I get up in the morning and think about the problems we have got to deal with today and also the problem of knowing part of me is missing. That is the single biggest thing to deal with." **MSL**



Surtees in his Cooper at Sandown during 1962.